

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Final MEETING MINUTES

October 5, 2020

Supervisors: David Williams, Andrew Mintz, Patrick Hearn, Kathie Becker, Elizabeth Austin, Associate Supervisor.

Supervisor Candidates: Grisha Maziya, Annika Rowland

Contractors: Susan Lavigne Thomas, Frances Gillespie (present through her report)

Partners: Heidi Ramsey, Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS), present for her report

Volunteers: Liz McGuire

Quorum: Chairman David Williams confirmed there was a quorum and opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m. While awaiting the quorum, Sue asked the Supervisors when they would like to receive meeting documents. There seemed to be a consensus that receiving a complete packet the week before the meeting is preferable.

Minutes: The September 14th meeting minutes were approved. Patrick. made the motion, David seconded and all were in favor.

District Conservationist Report: Heidi thanked MCD for organizing the tour of the dams. She really enjoyed it. Everyone else did as well. David thanked Heidi for attending. Patrick commented that he learned a great deal and was impressed with the magnitude of NRCS programming and commitment regarding dams and other water infrastructure so crucial to public safety going on quietly in the background. David talked about his connection to the dams and watershed, having worked for Bonisoli (?) Construction in Hudson, one of the contractors on the project. Dick Gelpe also has a connection to the place and is writing another History book on the subject, and the tour was a great help to him as well.

NRCS finished the fiscal year strong with 22 obligated contracts, 16 of them in Middlesex County. Heidi praised the team for their hard work and expertise in an exceptionally difficult year. Jack came on board during Covid as an FSA contractor and has put in a very strong and enthusiastic performance despite a steep learning curve and remote work environment. Bob has great deal of technical expertise and a deep background in agronomy. The Westford office, while in transition, is in a positive position. There is lots of new training on the calendar in soil health, reformatted for current conditions after being delayed by the coronavirus.

The Massachusetts Urban Agriculture Webinar was a huge success with 20-30 agency presenters from MDAR, NRCS, FSA and Rural Development. About 100 people stayed for the whole event. There are lots of grant opportunities coming out of the new office of Urban Agriculture in DC. Jack and Heidi are developing a survey about local needs and a mail list of contacts. NRCS and MDAR both have definitions of Urban Agriculture: selling commodities commercially from a (relatively) small plot. There is a listserv. Heidi will put Sue on it.

Annika asked for an explanation of NRCS contracts and Heidi explained that while there are many programs, most competitive contracts fall under the Environmental Quality Assessment Program (EQIP) and help landowners and farmers address resource concerns (land, air, water, forest, conservation) through planning, technical assistance and financial assistance. These programs are voluntary.

Heidi informed Sue that she can access information on the F drive to check on the status of projects should she or the District have a need to know.

Heidi informed us that the Farm Services Agency has called an emergency meeting to discuss declaring a drought in parts of MA and NH which would result in more money being released to the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) to help producers impacted.

Finally, Heidi announced that her last day will be sometime toward the end of October or Early November pending her relocation package to her new job in Colorado working for the Governor's Association. Rachel will fill in until a three month detail can be identified to serve as the DC while a search is undertaken for her permanent replacement. Everyone thanked Heidi and wished her luck. She reciprocated.

Plant Sale Coordinator's Report: Frances recapped the **fall sale**, which went smoothly despite the need to move to NARA Park and function in a smaller space. Sales were up close to 50%, most likely due to changing demand with coronavirus. There was no leftover stock. In fact, our regular wholesalers could not meet our orders, however, Frances was able to buy enough stock retail and still make some profit. Initial estimates predict that profits are up significantly; it may have been as successful as an average spring sale, perhaps because additional orders become more profitable once the initial plant sale costs are met. Mailing and printing costs may also have been lower, since once again letters were sent out via email and US mail without using the mail house, rather than postcards, however, this will need to be examined more closely. Frances noted that most of the extra orders came from intermittent customers rather than new people. The **Spring sale** is scheduled at Kimball Farm in Westford for the fourth week of April.

Revenue Generation Possibilities: Patrick and Andrew presented a rough draft of some revenue generation ideas they developed individually. Andrew spoke about creating an on-line store front (in addition to the plant sale) that would have a web presence but generate revenue

as an Affiliate or pass through where MCD would earn a commission on each sale without holding inventory or shipping goods. It is his understanding that the pass through earnings would be 10% of sales after the distributor ships the product. Neptune Sea Products is one he recommends starting with. Patrick then spoke about complementing our curated products with educational services, like soil testing, and pairing products that one would use together, such as ARS pruning shears together with plants. Patrick and Andrew would like to focus on goods that match our mission, like pollinators and lawn alternatives. Patrick spoke about developing a cadre of volunteers, perhaps building off the current plant sale volunteers, who in return for training, might become ambassadors, advocates and volunteer labor in support of our mission. He thinks the Master Gardener model of certification might be one possibility. Patrick is also particularly interested in additional efforts that increase and monetize carbon sequestration. Both Patrick and Andrew spoke of monetizing the MCD brand with the goal of creating a steady income stream. Liz believes that if we exceed two sales a year as a not for profit we will need to pay sales tax and is not sure how it will change our tax status. Sue will check with Tom. Do we need to partition some of our activities from others? Kathie brought up Project WET and Guide for teachers to teach about the water cycle and water conservation and wondered if we could have a team of volunteer educators running programs. Annika found the idea of building grassroots advocates, especially for pollinators, exciting. The group talked about the possibility of exchanging training for an internship – Sue does not think this is legal in MA to call it an internship, but there may be a way to structure this so it is a legal win win. Patrick reiterated the need for general, ongoing funding to complement grant funding, which is very beneficial but targeted to a very specific purpose, reimbursed after the fact and uncertain year to year. Masscraft may be able to provide an example/model for how this might be done.

Treasurer's Report: Liz spotted a contradiction in the report and Sue recommended the Board let her investigate and produce new reports in November rather than approving pieces of the report.

Budget: Sue shared a new view of the FY 2021 grant proposal budget as requested by EEA as well as the proposed FY 2021 MCD budget, however, this version still does not track very well with the new grants and the items now covered by them. Since MCD must request reimbursement for time and expenses based on the items in the grant, she feels more work must be done to align our accounting to ensure reimbursement and is concerned that some of our expenses, now listed as line items, might actually be eligible to be included in the grant line items and therefore be counted twice in the expense portion of the budget. More analysis is required before she is comfortable having the board approve the budget.

EEA Grant Review: EEA asked for a clarified budget for the FY 2021 grant application. Sue submitted the budget discussed above, showing how the funds from each of our grants, current

and proposed, flow from year to year, and what we plan to fund. This task, along with the quarterly reporting, which Board members have also received, documents where we are with all of our grants. In the coming month, Sue will work on the budget to support our current grant proposal submission, submit for reimbursement for our outstanding expenses and then focus on the content of our grants.

Supervisor Recruitment update: MCD is recruiting Supervisors to be sworn in in December at the annual meeting. Sue is excited to report that both Annika and Grisha joined the meeting as a result of the MassCraft posting. She has spoken with them and will follow up again with them after the meeting to answer any questions they may have. Sue suggested the other attendees introduce themselves with a sentence or two about their background or involvement with MCD.

Annika Rowland, visitor, is a recent Vassar grad with a degree in biology who has conducted research with bees, working for Boston Area Gleaners and very interested in pollinator protection, human and soil health. David mentioned that one of our prior Supervisors, Fred Farmer, is a beekeeper.

Grisha, visitor, is a UMass Amherst grad in soil science who began his career with golf courses and is now a garlic farmer on land trust property interested with a wide array of interests and a desire to give back to the community. He spoke a little bit about succession planning for farmers and about how he uses manure from a neighbor on his farm and would be happy to participate in our grant research. David pointed out that being a Supervisor does not preclude participating in cost sharing with NRCS, our partner organization.

David, Chairman, shared his background with Federal Fish and Wildlife the Assabet River Watershed, and working in silviculture in Hudson as well as his work on the Conservation Commission in Marlborough.

Patrick, Supervisor, is a retired engineer with an interest in soil science and carbon sequestration, starting a 5 acre organic farm in Acton who has taken Tufts New Entry Farmer Business Planning Course and participated in many of Northeast Organic Farming Association's soil science workshops.

Andrew, Supervisor, is an organic farmer who grows vegetables and cut flowers on his property in Stow. He is also a sculptor who works in granite, and a soccer coach. Andrew's passion is environmental education and he wants to improve the teaching of conservation to elementary school children. He feels the western states do a much better job of educating their youth about the environment.

Kathie, Supervisor, grew up on a farm, became an engineer, then completed a degree in biology and is focused on land use and wetlands as a member of her town's Agricultural Commission.

Liz, Assistant Supervisor, has a degree in environmental science and has worked in orchards and farms locally and overseas. She is looking for a way to get back in to environmental policy having worked as a paralegal and postperson.

Both Annika and Grisha expressed enthusiasm for the mission and workplan of MCD and a wish to learn more.

We discussed that new Supervisors are sworn in at our Annual Meeting, which will be December 7, 2020. We have a speaker from MDAR talking about hemp at the Yangtze River Restaurant on route 110 in Littleton.

Tours: Attendees really enjoyed our September tour. Sue asked if the group would like to schedule another one in the spring and solicited ideas. Great Brook Farm and Bading (?) brook were suggested. Other possible outings suggested were seeing the part of the Nashua River Watershed in our county (?)/learning from their very successful advocacy, participating in the Oars Celebration in the spring and reaching out to the Merrimack River Watershed Association in addition to our contacts with the Sudbury Valley Trustees.

Sue said she would try to go to the Middlesex County Farm Bureau Annual Meeting, since MCD is a member.

Andrew made the motion to adjourn at 9:03, David seconded and all were in favor.

Minutes recorded and respectfully submitted,

Susan Lavigne Thomas

District Administrator

